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The Biden/Harris campaign and the dead-end of “lesser evil” politics

The Democratic Party National Convention is beginning today, a four-day affair that will conclude with the official nomination Thursday of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as the Democrats' candidates for president and vice president. The following week, the Republican National Convention will be convened to officially renominate Trump, setting the stage for the final two months of the US elections.

The 2020 elections are being held under extraordinary conditions. The coronavirus pandemic has spiraled out of control. More than 170,000 people have already died in the US, and by the time of the election this figure will be close to or above a quarter of a million. More than 30 million people are unemployed amidst the greatest social crisis since the Great Depression. Millions face poverty and eviction from their homes following the cutoff of federal unemployment benefits three weeks ago.

There is enormous popular hostility to the Trump administration, which is directly responsible for this catastrophe. The policies that it has spearheaded—including the back-to-work campaign initiated in May and the ongoing efforts to reopen schools—have led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Well aware of growing opposition, the administration is working to sabotage mail-in voting to deny substantial portions of the population the right to vote.



Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden and his running mate Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., arrive to speak at a news conference at Alexis Dupont High School in Wilmington, Del., Wednesday, Aug. 12, 2020. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

Under these conditions, enormous pressure is being brought to bear to convince workers and young people to support the campaign of Biden and Harris. Whatever reservations they may have over the right-wing character of the Democratic Party and its candidates, the argument goes, this is the only way to get rid of Trump. Everything else must be subordinated to this electoral outcome.

This is hardly the first election in which such “lesser evil” arguments were advanced. In 1988, it was a matter of voting for Dukakis, the right-wing governor from Massachusetts, to finally put an end to the Reagan years. After Dukakis lost to George H.W. Bush, the following election in 1992 became a matter of putting an end to the Bush years by electing Bill Clinton, whose right-wing policies cleared the path for Bush II in 2000. In 2008, the argument became the need to elect Obama, the “candidate of hope and change,” in order to end the disaster produced by Bush II, above all, the war in Iraq.

Obama continued the most right-wing policies of George W. Bush (with whom, by the way, he has established a close personal friendship), including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the overseeing of the Wall Street bailout following the 2008 financial collapse. It was the right-wing policies of Obama and the nomination of Hillary Clinton on the basis of a prowar program, glossed over with identity politics, that created the conditions for the election of Trump in 2016.

This act, in other words, has been played out before, and each time the result is a further shift to the right of the entire political establishment.

In this case, amidst all the hoopla over the “historic” character of the Biden-Harris ticket, attributed entirely to the race and gender of Harris, the nominees have been selected through the machinations of the Democratic Party against the candidacy of Bernie Sanders and even Elizabeth Warren.

That is, the Democratic Party’s campaign is founded on a repudiation of any suggestion that it will carry out a policy of social reform. The Democrats are not even making the pretense of providing a program to address the catastrophe unfolding in the United States.

Sanders himself is now playing the central role in convincing his previous supporters that, despite everything, Biden’s election must be the overriding aim. This was his basic theme in speaking on several of the morning talk shows yesterday.

A particularly revealing exchange came on CNN, when moderator Jake Tapper cited a comment in the *Wall Street Journal* stating that Wall Street breathed a “sigh of relief” at the nomination of the right-wing ex-prosecutor Harris as vice president. He then asked, “If Wall Street breathes a sigh of relief with Kamala Harris being named to the ticket, what does Bernie Sanders do?”

To this, Sanders replied, “Well, Bernie Sanders does everything that he can to defeat Donald Trump. ... Donald Trump must be defeated. Biden must be elected.” Sanders continued, “And after the Democrats have control of the Senate and the House, and Joe is the president, we’re going to do all that we can to mobilize people for a progressive agenda.”

In fact, the same arguments used to insist that everything must be subordinated to Biden will be re-employed to argue that nothing can be done to destabilize a future Biden administration, because that will only strengthen the right. As always, it is an argument against any mobilization of the working class against the entire policy of the ruling elites, represented by both the Democrats and Republicans.

Absent in all of this is any serious examination of what produced Trump. He is not, after all, some ogre that has emerged from the depths of hell. Trump is himself a product of the capitalist system. He is a representative of the financial oligarchy.

There are differences between the Democrats and Republicans. However, the conflict within the state is between two factions of the ruling class.

Sections of big business and the military-intelligence agencies are opposed to Trump primarily over issues of foreign policy, particularly in relation to Russia. Summing up the concerns of the ruling class, a comment in the *Washington Post* by Josh Rogin praised the selection of Harris as vice president because “those close to Harris describe her as a ‘Truman Democrat,’ a nod to her willingness to use American power to promote American values and interests.” That is, Harris, if she were to become president, will be willing to wage war to advance the interests of the American ruling class.

More evidence of corporate America’s tilt towards the Democrats comes from the reports that the lion’s share of financial support from the stock market and the major banks is going to Biden and not Trump, as well as the huge surge in big-money donations that followed the selection of Harris.

As for the policy of the ruling class in relation to the pandemic, both parties have united in using the pandemic to transfer trillions of dollars to Wall Street—sanctioned by the CARES Act passed in late March—and enforce the back-to-work campaign in states throughout the country, whether led by Democrats or Republicans.

The basic aim of the Democratic Party is to strangle and suppress the growing opposition of the working class. The policies of the ruling elite are producing a social explosion. Teachers and students are mobilizing against the effort to reopen schools. Workers have begun forming rank-and-file committees to oppose the homicidal back-to-work campaign and the unsafe conditions in factories and workplaces.

The Socialist Equality Party and our election campaign reject all efforts to subordinate the working class to the electoral considerations of the Democratic Party. We insist that the fight against the pandemic is a fight against the capitalist system. The methods that must be employed are the methods of class struggle.

The SEP is spearheading the organization of workers against the homicidal policy of the ruling elite, in opposition to all factions of the ruling class, on the basis of a revolutionary program to put an end to inequality, war, dictatorship and the capitalist system. We urge workers and young people who agree with this program to support the SEP election campaign and join and build our party.

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